

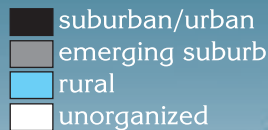
Maine Coastline

News from the Maine Coastal Program

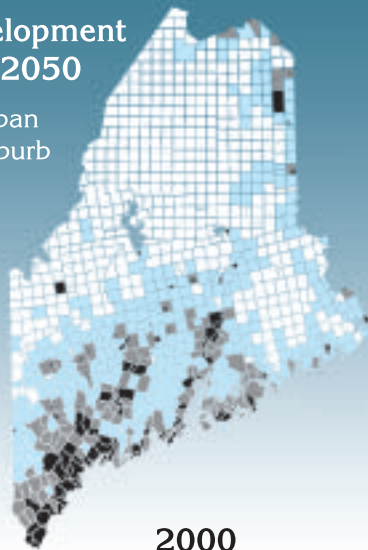
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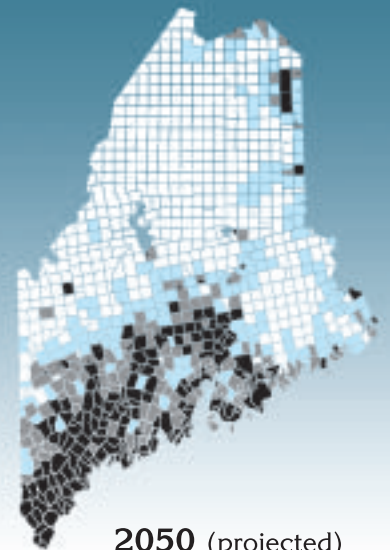
Expansion of Development in Maine 1940-2050



1940



2000



2050 (projected)

Fully one-third of land in Maine's southernmost counties is now suburban: a marked change from the landscape six decades ago. If current trends continue, most of the communities along the length of Maine's coast will qualify as "suburban" by 2050.

map: Dick Kelly/Maine SPO

Managing Growth and Development along Maine's Coast

Rapid development along the coast is changing the "timeless" quality that once seemed to define Maine's sparsely settled shores and countryside. What might look at first like an "immigration" of new residents is more aptly a collective dispersal *out* from town centers into formerly undeveloped areas. Between 1990 and 2000, population in most coastal counties grew between 9 and 13.5 percent while housing growth rose at rates up to 139 percent (in Kennebunkport). Growth in seasonal housing increased even faster, reaching a rate of 266 percent (in Wiscasset). New homes, mini-malls and large shopping complexes now mark the "suburbs" surrounding many established towns. Between 1950 and 2000, the amount of suburban land in Maine nearly doubled: fully one-third of the land in its seven southernmost counties now qualifies as suburban.

Sprawling patterns of growth, while easy to recognize, are hard to manage. This issue of *Maine Coastline* examines how coastal communities might grow sustainably - fostering economic growth in thriving downtown centers without the social and ecological costs that

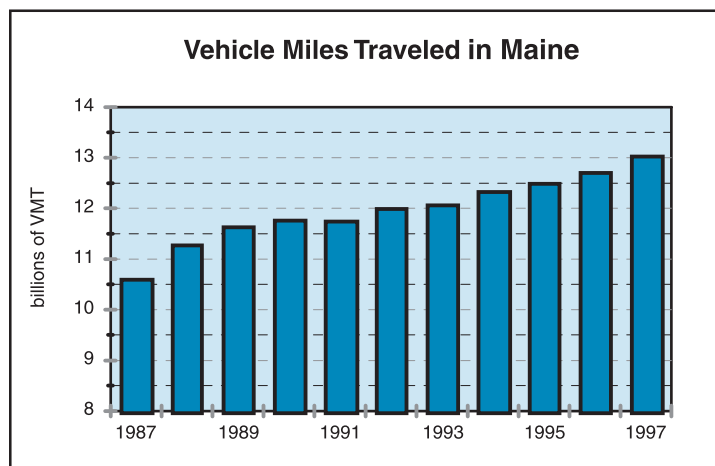
accompany sprawl: increased taxes; more vehicle miles traveled, traffic congestion and accidents; and the degradation of scenic resources, air and water quality, and wildlife habitat. "We've paid a high price already for breaking ecological patterns," says State Representative Ted Koffman, an active proponent of managed growth. "To lessen our impact, we need to create systemic change."

That change is starting to happen at every level from State policies down to homeowners' choices, fueled by a new vision for the 'way life should be.' "It's about imagination," note the

authors of a 1997 report to the State Planning Office, *The Costs of Sprawl*: "—the ability to look around to see what it is we value about Maine, and to act in ways [that] enhance rather than detract from that value."

The Search for Solutions

Legislators and governmental staff have begun to explore how State policies could better foster sound development and discourage sprawl. A bipartisan Community Preservation



While Maine's population grew by only 3 percent in the decade preceding 1998, vehicle miles traveled increased by 23 percent.

(continued on page 3)



Director's Column

July 2004

Every so often, new terms get invented for concepts that have been around a while, possibly to remind people of their renewed relevance. Long before the terms “growth management,” “sustainable development,” “livable communities,” and “smart growth” were coined, the Coastal Zone Management Act encouraged participating states and local governments to balance growth and new opportunities in the coastal zone with conservation and traditional uses. Since 1978, the Maine Coastal Program has helped communities plan for their future, gaining the support they need from state and regional commission staff. Terminology and program names have changed over the years, but the essence of our work has always centered on good planning.

Currently, communities in Maine’s southern and midcoast regions are struggling with challenges due to rapid growth even as some towns downeast still contend with depressed economies. The challenge of “managing” growth and development is not a singular one: each community must choose from a broad menu of approaches and see which strategies work “on the ground.”

In this issue of *Maine Coastline*, we highlight some examples of good planning that are underway, from state-level policy discussions to regional dialogues to specific revitalization efforts. This diverse mix of projects reminds us that it takes hard work by scores of people to retain what is special about Maine. Along the length of the coast, town officials, volunteers, developers and conservationists are doing that difficult task, striving to make their communities better places to live and work. We hope that the examples in this newsletter will spark ideas for creative approaches that might benefit your community. The stories here affirm that good planning, whatever language it’s dressed in, never goes out of style.

Kathleen Leyden
Maine Coastal Program Director

Maine Coastline

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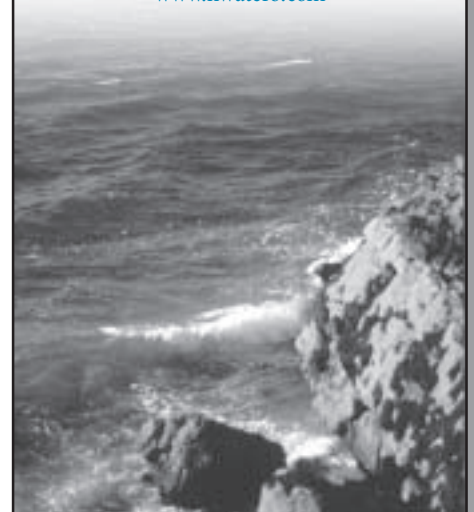
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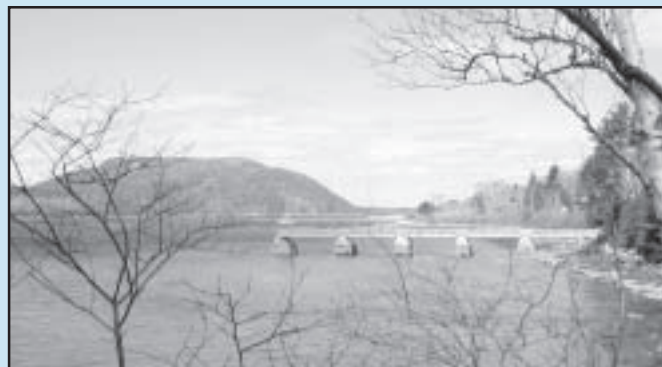
Advisory Committee is discussing barriers to affordable workforce housing, reviewing how State tax policy affects service center towns and land use, and determining how to help communities craft comprehensive plans that are consistent with the State's growth management goals. "We're still deciding what parts of the State system should be adjusted," says Committee Cochair Rep. Ted Koffman. The State should provide more incentives, he believes, for municipalities to pursue balanced growth. For example, the Legislature recently passed a law that allows towns to use tax increment financing (TIF) programs for construction of workforce housing. This measure could help reverse a coastwide trend in which lower-tier wage-earners are forced to migrate inland, unable to afford escalating housing costs along the immediate coast.

In their efforts to manage growth, towns are seeking ways to improve services while minimizing costs. One possibility, explored by a recent governmental task force, is to move toward increased "regionalism"—delivering governmental services more efficiently by consolidating those that can best be done on a broader regional scale. This approach has served other states well, providing comparable services at lower tax rates. Yet regional initiatives often bump up against Maine's tradition of "home rule." Many people remain unwilling to "cede local control, even if that's what's needed to regain some control over their destiny," says Ed Suslovic, a State Representative from Portland who served on the Regionalism Task Force. "The world is changing a lot faster than Maine's willingness to deal with projects that have multi-municipal impacts," he adds: "we're woefully ill-equipped to deal with projects that require more than municipal review. The attitude seems to be 'let's be more regional, but not in my town!'"

In spite of resistance, some efforts at regional cooperation are taking hold. Land trusts and watershed groups have long recognized the value of pursuing landscape-scale protection, working with multiple partners in adjoining communities. "It can be difficult to move across traditional boundaries," concedes Roger Cole, coordinator of the regional Mount Agamenticus to the Sea Initiative (see page 5 story). "But increasingly people are willing to see the whole, rather than just 'my town' and 'your town.'"

Some local officials hope to contain growing property taxes through regional cost-sharing. A committee involving five communities north of Portland recently received a "Regional Challenge Grant" from the Maine State Planning Office to explore whether emergency response/dispatch and other public safety functions could be consolidated. The committee sees itself as creating "a framework for cooperation" that can come to support additional functions—such as regional land-use management—once there's greater public recognition of the benefits regional consolidation can offer. Committee Chair Bill Stiles says the planning process has "opened up a dialogue that I don't think was there and increased the sense of trust among communities—which in itself has been a great benefit." With town representatives working together, he says, there's a better chance of finding the ideal economy of scale for each municipal service.

While many efforts to manage growth and development are still in the planning and discussion phase, promising initiatives are underway. "We need people to continually put forward an overarching vision," says Rep. Ed Suslovic, "but accept that the initial steps may be miniscule. Our best hope is to keep building on those tiny changes."



New scenic assessment guidelines help to gauge the visual impact of development projects like large piers.

A Better Approach to Protecting Maine's Scenery

Poorly designed development can quickly erode the beauty of natural landmarks that the public enjoys. Yet in reviewing plans for potential development, State regulators have had no way to define much less mitigate damaging visual impacts. Passage last summer of a new set of rules that are part of the State's Natural Resources Protection Act should help address this long-standing challenge.

The new rules define how to evaluate scenic impacts in three key areas: compatibility with the surrounding landscape (how the color, form, line and texture of structures and building materials blend in), "scale contrast" (how a project fits in scale with surrounding objects), and "spatial dominance" (the project's prominence within the whole landscape). The rules also establish when more detailed visual assessments are needed and how developers can avoid and reduce scenic impacts.

In developing the new rules, staff at the Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) drew upon related work done by the National Park Service and Army Corps of Engineers. No other states have yet established regulations regarding potential visual impacts, but both federal agencies have extensive experience assessing scenic impacts. "The most important thing that came out of this process," says Judy Gates of the DEP, "is that it's possible to take a subjective judgement and turn it into objective criteria. Now that we've defined these criteria, one person can assign points to a given project and make a fair decision." This model may prove helpful for municipalities that seek to craft ordinances concerning visual impacts. For more information, contact Judy Gates at 207-287-7691 or Judy.Gates@maine.gov.

Mount Desert Island

Through an ongoing citizen’s forum known as MDI Tomorrow, Mount Desert Island residents are identifying what they want for their communities and working collaboratively to realize their goals. The process began in 1987 with interviews and neighborhood meetings discussing how the island’s growing popularity as a seasonal resort was affecting its year-round community. Ron Beard, an Extension Educator with University of Maine Cooperative Extension, has helped facilitate the MDI Tomorrow process. He describes it as a valuable model for other coastal communities facing similar challenges: summertime gridlock; concerns about the capacity of the place to absorb more visitors; diminishing air and water quality; lack of affordable housing for local workers; and loss of businesses that support a year-round economy.

The early MDI Tomorrow discussions produced a newspaper supplement describing the “preferred future” that island residents hoped to create. Forum organizers (a diverse group representing many local organizations and agencies) then held a series of conferences that spawned several successful pilot projects—including a high school internship program and the Island Explorer bus service.

Dialogue about MDI’s future heated up again in 2000 and task forces (aided by extensive use of e-mail) began working on projects ranging from year-round housing, community design, and walking/biking opportunities to local food production/consumption, community/school gardening, and early childhood development. “We’re continually linking issues,” Ron Beard explains, “such as housing and open space or transportation and land use. Both the strength and the difficulty of this process is that we’re trying to do it all at once.”

Housing, Beard says, has proven to be “the biggest intractable issue” facing the island, forcing serious consideration of “how best to intervene in the marketplace because it’s not leading where we want to go.” Forum dialogues prompted the revitalization of an Island Housing Trust that plans to create at least 400 housing units for working island families in the next eight years. Their plan is to subsidize the price of development and hold equity in the properties (to help people make the necessary down payments and—when people move—to keep the houses available for other moderate-income families).

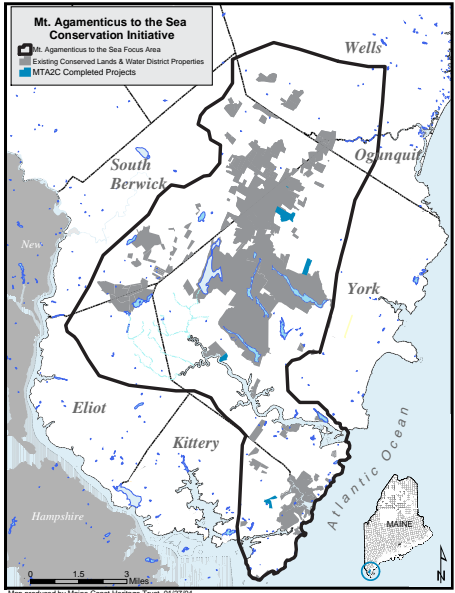
The MDI Tomorrow process works to engage community youth in its deliberations, Beard says, “creating a climate where they’re encouraged to attend.” A survey done by a group of high school students called Youth Engaging in Society (YES) revealed that young people shared many of the concerns held by older citizens on the island such as the need for better community design and land use, and improved public transportation. As a result of the MDI Tomorrow process, community members are planning to expand the Island Explorer bus service to operate year-round and transport older



Through focused community planning, residents of Mount Desert Island have launched several successful initiatives—including creation of the Island Explorer bus service which is helping to reduce traffic congestion and improve air quality.

students, enabling them to engage in after-school activities without needing to drive. Local nonprofits are also working to better coordinate their support for healthy youth.

“Part of what we’ve learned to date,” Beard explains, “is that we need good policies as well as good projects.” We’ve commissioned the University of Maine to conduct a survey to determine what sorts of policy changes local people would support within government, the school system, businesses and the nonprofit sector. MDI Tomorrow is also working to bring more people into the community dialogue. While more than 300 people are now on the forum’s e-mail lists, organizers hope to engage more members of the business community and local government, as well as those with limited economic means and formal schooling. For more information on the ongoing work of MDI Tomorrow, visit www.mditomorrow.org.



Maine’s Southernmost Coast

York County is on the front lines of growth management. More than half of its towns, faced with record numbers of building permit applications, have enacted “growth caps” limiting the number of permits that can be issued. A controversial casino proposal, defeated last fall, helped highlight the region’s need to foster economic growth and lower property taxes without aggravating existing problems such as sprawl, traffic congestion, and insufficient housing.

With funding from a Maine State Planning Office “Regional Challenge Grant,” the Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission (SMRPC) recently hosted six workshops to help residents define what kind of development they do want. SMRPC Executive Director Paul Schumacher, who organized the

workshops, hopes to see a regional plan emerge (something that has not been done since 1992), but says planning may need to be structured by issue or geographic sub-region because York County is now so large and populous: “We’re working to find the most appropriate areas for coordination and collaboration,” he says, “and are bringing in other groups besides cities and towns.”

Other community-based efforts are already underway, such as “Our Future by Design,” an effort to improve quality of life in Kittery, Eliot, York and South Berwick. This grassroots initiative grew out of a “Community Wellness Coalition” that considers community needs in housing, education, the economy, the natural environment, arts and culture, spiritual and mental health, youth and teen concerns, and illness prevention. Assessments of community well-being, says coalition coordinator Cathy Goodwin, dovetail with growth management because both seek to build on community strengths and improve quality of life. The Coalition emphasizes the “soft side of community planning—such as education, arts and culture, and social services,” Goodwin says, “because people relate better to change if we consider all their needs.”

With support from the Greater York Region Chamber of Commerce, Maine Sea Grant and York Hospital, the Coalition is spending six months developing an action plan through a process of open community forums, interest group dialogues, and grassroots organizing. Organizers hope that this process may lead to greater regional collaboration and perhaps some consolidation of services: “the challenge,” Goodwin notes, “is to benefit from economies of scale where appropriate while still keeping the small-town identity and neighborhood feel that we value.”

One of the most successful regional planning efforts to date, in York County and all of Maine, is a collaborative effort to protect 9,000 acres stretching from the forests on Mount Agamenticus to the wildlife-rich marshlands and uplands of the York River, Brave Boat Harbor estuary and Gerrish Island. The effort began in 1999 when a small group of conservation entities began working to protect forestlands surrounding the summit of “Mount A.” Their early success, combined with intensifying development pressures, motivated a broader coalition to engage in open-space planning on a larger scale. “Now six communities are involved,” says Mt. A to the Sea Initiative coordinator Roger Cole. “We’re assisting communities to build their conservation planning capacity by providing resources that they might not have access to otherwise. It’s a valuable process for all those involved: ten partner groups (including federal and state agencies, as well as state-wide and local land conservation organizations) are working to realize a landscape-wide vision of protecting key lands in this ecologically rich stretch of southernmost Maine.”

Regionalism, Maine-Style

A Guest Column by Evan Richert

Planning and governing at a scale of 30-40 square miles (the size of a typical Maine town) have well-known advantages. But there are huge disadvantages, too. One we have known for a long time: the inability to think at the scale of natural systems. Another—redundancy in local government—is proving increasingly costly.

In 1960, just 80 (16 percent) of Maine's towns had populations of 2,500 or more. Only 59 had populations of 3,500. By 2015, the State Planning Office projects that 148 Maine towns (fully 30 percent) will have passed the 2,500 mark, with 109 over 3,500.

These are important statistics for two reasons. First: much of the growth in small towns is coming from the redistribution of the state's population, not from overall growth. This is the phenomenon of sprawl. Second, the 2,500-3,500 population range represents a kind of break-point in the cost of local government. At this level, the nature of town government begins to change from a largely volunteer organization to one with a full-time staff and suburban services.

These statistics represent the "smoking gun" behind Maine's high cost of local government—a cost that is 10 to 20 percent higher than in peer states. The combination of sprawl, along with a system of local government cut up into 489 individual municipalities and 280 school districts (each increasingly called upon to deliver redundant suburban services), is a recipe for high costs.

The challenge is to overcome this built-in inefficiency without sacrificing Maine's bottom-up, small-scale, highly accessible form of government. A project of the Environmental Finance Center at the University of Southern Maine's Muskie School has proposed one possible approach (see <http://efc.muskie.usm.maine.edu/docs/EFCModelLegislation.pdf>). This strategy calls for voluntary formation of "municipal service districts," essentially a new form of local government that emerges from and mimics town government itself.

Each municipal district would include a few to several towns joined together by a new home rule charter. Town governments would continue to exist, but the municipal district would have final authority to adopt a single, district-wide budget and to set a district-wide property tax rate. The district would have a single planning board, comprehensive plan, and one set of land use regulations, enabling control of sprawl across towns. In each municipal district there would be a single school district and school board.

Towns would have strong financial incentives to form districts, including relief of general obligation debt, a bonus in school aid, and assumption by the State of certain county costs that now fall on the local property tax. Based on experience in peer states, this system of municipal service districts could save local government in Maine from \$100 million to \$150 million annually.

Evan Richert is Associate Research Professor at the Muskie School of Public Service, University of Southern Maine. He teaches graduate courses in land-use planning and is Program Director of the Gulf of Maine Census of Marine Life.

Resources

For a thorough list of potential readings and organizations, see the "links" and "publications" sections of the State Planning Office Land Use Team web page at <http://www.state.me.us/spo/landuse/>.

Beginning with Habitat provides presentations, maps, information and technical assistance to help communities take a habitat-based approach to landscape planning. Contact Elizabeth Hertz (Elizabeth.Hertz@maine.gov or 287-8935) or see <http://www.beginningwithhabitat.org/>.

The Regional Challenge Grant Program at the Maine State Planning Office offers grants of up to \$15,000 (matched at 100 percent by the applicant and partners) to support promising regional initiatives that integrate sustainable growth principles and link to comprehensive plan strategies. Contact Fred Landa at 207-287-3860 or fred.landa@maine.gov.

Maine Downtown Center, a program of the Maine Development Foundation, helps towns take action to revitalize their traditional business districts. Participating communities hire a downtown manager for at least three years, getting technical support from the Center. See <http://www.mdf.org/downtown/> or call 622-6345.

Friends of Midcoast Maine, a nonprofit organization promoting sensible growth between Brunswick and Bucksport, has created "smart growth" criteria for new projects and helps towns conduct build-out analyses. Contact FMM at 207-236-1077, or view www.friendsmidcoast.org.

GrowSmart Maine, with funding support from the Maine Coastal Program, is producing a series of educational "briefs," three of which are available online at www.growsmartmaine.org. The Coastal Program is also helping to support their Annual Smart Growth Summit, which is planned for November 19 at the Augusta Civic Center. Visit their web site for more information.

Community Visioning Handbook: How to Imagine— and Create—A Better Future, provides a step-by-step guide to creating a "community vision"—a shared mental picture for how the community will look and function in coming years. To view online, visit <http://www.state.me.us/spo/landuse/docs/visioning/visioning.pdf>.

Markets for Traditional Neighborhoods summarizes a 1999 survey of recent homebuyers in Maine that indicates 43 percent of those who move into suburban and rural areas would consider living in a traditional, walkable neighborhood. To view online, visit <http://www.state.me.us/spo/landuse/docs/MarketsforTradNeighborhoods.pdf>.

Community Rules: A New England Guide to Smart Growth, contains examples of communities that have laid the groundwork for smart growth through sensible planning, zoning, and other strategies. Read more at http://www.clf.org/pubs/community_rules_web.htm.

Sustaining Coastal Zone Communities: A Collage of Creative Approaches

Revitalized Downtowns



Through participation in the Maine Downtown Center, Gardiner has revitalized its town center, attracting new businesses, improving storefronts, and holding popular community festivals.

Town of Gardiner

Development in Town:



The Quarry Hill retirement community in Camden constructed clustered housing within walking distance of the village center, providing senior residents easy access to cultural opportunities and shopping.

Friends of Midcoast Maine

Alternative Transportation Options



Portland's efforts over four years to improve bicycle commuting have paid off in unforeseen ways. In addition to having a new set of striped bike lanes on selected streets, the City was chosen by the national magazine BICYCLING in July 2003 to be its official BIKE TOWN.

Bicycle Coalition of Maine

Adaptive Reuse of Historic Structures



Peter Basse/Random Orbit



Park Street Elevation



West Elevation



East Elevation

Stephen Tibbitts

This abandoned mill in Saco will soon be remodeled into 34 "loft" units where artists and others can both live and work. A similar 8-unit project in Portland helped stimulate the opening of a gallery nearby, additional residential units next door, and improvements to rundown industrial buildings in the vicinity.



Maine SPO

Thanks to recent State legislation, the City of South Portland was able to offer tax increment financing (TIF) to help developer Richard Berman (inset photo) convert the former Maine Youth Center in South Portland into offices and construct affordable townhomes, elderly housing, condominiums and community gardens.

Clean Marinas Program Expands

A "Clean Boatyards and Marinas Program" launched last year in Casco Bay has expanded to the midcoast and Penobscot Bay, thanks to the hard work of the Maine Marine Trade Association. Participating businesses voluntarily agree to use a checklist to improve operations involving stormwater runoff, boat maintenance and repair, fueling activities/petroleum control, waste recycling, disposal and storage, and boat pumpout. For more information on the program, contact MMTA at 773-8725 or e-mail Susan Swanton at swanton@mmtaonline.com.



The Clean Marinas program includes special bins to encourage boaters to recycle.

Maine Marine Trade Association

ities and welcomes additional participants from seasonal islands. Upcoming discussion topics include property tax escalation, homeowners insurance, fire protection, and school consolidation and regionalization. To learn more, contact Rob Snyder (rsnyder@islandinstitute.org, 594-9209).

Managing Stormwater in Cold Climates

The Maine Coastal Program, Casco Bay Estuary Project and Cumberland County Soil and Water Conservation District recently cosponsored the first international conference in North America dedicated to addressing the challenges of urban stormwater management in cold climates. The two-day event provided a forum for dialogue, information exchange and problem-solving across multiple disciplines and cold climate regions—drawing 55 presenters and 375 participants from six nations and twenty-two states. The proceedings, available on line at <http://www.cascobay.usm.maine.edu/proceed.html>, summarize some of the best management practices currently in place for cold climate stormwater management. For more information, please contact Todd Janeski at the Maine Coastal Program (Todd.Janeski@maine.gov or 287-1482).

2004 State of the Gulf Summit

Citizens and professionals from throughout the Gulf of Maine region will be gathering in St. Andrews, New Brunswick from October 26-29 to discuss the health of the Gulf of Maine ecosystem and assess the diversity of research and planning initiatives currently underway (from citizen watershed monitoring to regional planning and habitat restoration). For more information, visit www.gulfofmainesummit.org or contact Lorraine Lessard at the Maine State Planning Office (lorraine.lessard@maine.gov or 287-1486).

Maine Islands Coalition Forms

The Maine Islands Coalition has begun meeting to discuss issues and advocate for the economic and environmental sustainability of year-round island communities. The Coalition has representatives from Maine's 15 year-round commu-



Keynote speaker Gary Oberts, Karen Young of the Casco Bay Estuary Project, and Maine Coastal Program's Todd Janeski at the Cold Climate Stormwater conference.

Maine SPO



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The Maine Coastal Program represents a partnership of local, regional and state agencies that work collaboratively to enhance management of the state's diverse coastal resources. Housed at the State Planning Office, Coastal Program staff work extensively with governmental agencies and community organizations such as local land trusts and regional economic development groups. Planning and outreach focus on such issues as watershed management, development issues, fisheries management, water quality monitoring, marine education, citizen stewardship, coastal hazards, marine infrastructure and habitat protection.

For more information on the Maine Coastal Program, please visit our website at www.maineoceanprogram.org.

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